2:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 A Wll Kerala A Wll
Central Kerala Nayar

Shortly before or after puberty she might, following the ceremony, enter without religious rites into sexual liaisons with one or more men of her own or an appropriate higher caste. Similarly, a Nayar man (whether or not he had ever performed the tāli rite) might enter into relationships with any number of women of his own or an appropriate lower Nayar caste.

These marriage customs are further discussed below. Here it is relevant to point only to the role of the *enangan* bridegroom. Since the enangar stood to the lineage as formal representatives of the local caste group, it seems appropriate to interpret the tāli rite as a ceremony of group marriage, in which the caste group as a whole married the immature girls of the lineage as a whole.

The tāli rite was indeed both a religious and a legal transaction between the lineage and the enangu or neighborhood group. If a girl was discovered to have attained puberty before it had been performed, the assembly forced her property group to expel her and to perform her funeral rites, for she was thought to be ritually dangerous to her caste as a whole. For a woman, the tāli which she wore round her neck until death was therefore a sign that she had been ceremonially and legally accepted as a mature woman of her lineage and caste, "cleared" to bear children to perpetuate both groups.

The lineage similarly operated as a unit, and the enangar fulfilled similar roles as formal links with the caste on the occasion of a funeral. All adult males of the lineage who were junior to the deceased attended his cremation, which took place in the southwest corner of the garden of his house. Representative members of all enangar households also came to help with practical tasks and to provide ritual objects for the chief mourner's ceremonies, although they were forbidden to touch or to receive food from the mourners throughout their period of pollution. In the fifteen days after the death only the deceased's household, assisted by their special enangar households, took part in the collection of the bones and ashes and made offerings to the departed spirit. Other lineage members observed death pollution in their homes and were attended by enangar there. On the fifteenth day the lineage reassembled at the house of the dead. After many ceremonies its members were purified by the funeral priest from the pollution of death. On the sixteenth day final offerings were made to the spirit. The deceased's household then held a large feast, which was shared by lineage members and representatives from all houses of the linked lineages. This reception of food by the enangar from the hands of the deceased's matrilineal kinsmen marked a

4:Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

kāranavan's death, his adopted successor was too young to manage the property. This passed temporarily into the management of a man from still another branch of the same lineage. When the true claimant came of age he disputed his guardian's management. After a bitter lawsuit the guardian was deposed in a British court. He continued to live on the *taravād*'s land and to harass his young successor. When the guardian died, the young *kāranavan* in his anger failed to arrange for the cremation rites until several days had passed and the corpse had decomposed. The ghost of this proxy *kāranavan* has harrassed his successors ever since, causing many of them to die of diabetes. The present members regard this condition as a decomposition of the body during life. The ghost's anger is so great that propitiations do not wholly avert its vengeance, although special offerings temporarily delay the progress of the disease.

The misfortunes inflicted by lineage ghosts include many forms of sickness, mental disorder, female barrenness and miscarriages, all of which are attributed to actual bodily possession by a ghost. Financial loss, crop failure and the deaths of babies or cows may also result from the ghosts' displeasure. I could find no very clear distinction between the misfortunes inflicted by lineage ghosts and those brought about by the patron goddess, by malevolent alien ghosts, or by the witchcraft or sorcery of enemies. Indeed it is obvious that the Nāyars themselves do not clearly restrict particular misfortunes to particular agents. For on the occasion of a misfortune, the *kāranavan* must often consult the village astrologer (Kanisan) who makes calculations to discover the responsible agent. He then instructs the *kāranavan* how to carry out its propitiation or to accomplish its control.

However, my information suggests that some misfortunes may be more likely to be attributed to some agents than to others. Miscarriages, for example, seem to be often attributed to ancestresses, to female alien ghosts, or to the patron goddess. Barrenness is often attributed to the snake gods of the *taravād*, who are believed to guard the fertility of its women. These misfortunes seem to be less often attributed to male ghosts, although some instances are known. Perhaps most important, however, circumstances immediately preceding the misfortune may help to determine the agent. If a forebear has died recently, or if a *taravād* has failed to propitiate its lineage ghosts or patron goddess, the *kāranavan* may not even trouble to consult the astrologer, or the astrologer may merely corroborate his suspicions. Similarly, if a man has an enemy with whom he has recently quarreled and then himself falls ill with fever, he is like to assume that the enemy has engaged the services of a witch or sorcerer against him. In small villages whose population is stable, moreover, the astrologer makes it his business to know the affairs of his clients and thus to diagnose appropriate causes for their misfortunes.

Sociological analysis. A satisfactory analysis of the functions of lineage ghosts must take into account those of other supernatural agents and of secular authorities. Among the Nāyars, supernatural agents have played only a minor role in punishing offences against men, as distinct from those against themselves. This is undoubtedly because human authorities of various kinds had strong judicial functions, deriving from their incorporation in a kingdom. In the last analysis their authority was backed by the military power of the king or chief. Among Nāyars, civil disputes were tried by village headman or district chief. Certain major crimes against the kingdom's religious laws were tried in the Raja's court. They included the killing of a cow or a Brahman or fornication with lower caste persons. The killing or assault of a Nāyar

4: Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AWII Kerala AWII
Nayar

The Killing or assault of a Nayar

outside the lineage led to feuds between lineages or between larger territorial units. In Cochin, the king had more power than in Kottayam to curtail such feuds or confine them to organized duels for which a fee must be paid. Minor offences against caste law, such as dining with low caste persons, were tried by the subcaste assembly of the village and resulted in temporary excommunication of the offender's property group and the payment of a fine to the village goddess's temple.

The *kāranavan* had the legal right to punish offences within the property group and also those offences against caste law for which the caste held the property group responsible until justice had been done. Incest and murder within the lineage appear to have been punished by expulsion from the *taravād* by the *kāranavan* and from the caste by the caste assembly. In cases of grave insubordination by a junior member, the *kāranavan* had the right to deny him maintenance or access to the ancestral house until he mended his behavior.

Thus the supernatural agents of the village and the *taravād* primarily acted to force the human authorities to carry out their judicial duties. If, for example, the caste failed to excommunicate the *taravād* of an individual who had sinned against its religious laws, it was believed that the village goddess would strike the village with epidemic, flood, or some such misfortune. Similarly, if incest within the lineage went undetected or unpunished, the lineage ghosts and the patron goddess might cause the offenders to die or might bring misfortune on the *taravād* as a whole.

The fact that any member of the *taravād* may suffer as a result of the misdemeanors of any other, carries into the realm of supernatural sanctions the collective responsibility of the *taravād* in social and legal affairs. If a man breaks a ritual rule of the caste, his whole *taravād* is polluted and liable for excommunication. If a death or birth occurs, the whole lineage is temporarily polluted and excluded from normal social life. At the back of these norms lies the fact that the *taravād* is an economic and legal corporation. Its property is owned jointly, and the *taravād* is responsible for the debts of any one member. Its male members must support each other in feuds against other lineages. It is not surprising that the concept of being members one of another in secular affairs is projected into the realm of mystical retributions.

The points at which supernatural agents might replace, or act instead of, human authorities, appear to have been those where a subordinate was wronged by one who was himself a powerful authority and could manipulate the law. Thus lineage ghosts were probably particularly effective in punishing or setting to rights misdemeanors of the *kāranavan* himself. I am uncertain whether, in traditional law, junior members could sue in court for the deposition of an erring *kāranavan*. They certainly possessed this right in British law, but even so, it was very difficult before 1933 to get rid of a *kāranavan*. The lineage ghosts appear to have provided important sanctions against a *kāranavan's* misdoings, for they brought misfortune on a *taravād* whose *kāranavan* disgraced its reputation for hospitality or squandered its property. I was told that the former custom by which a junior member might be possessed by a ghost and voice its threats to the *taravād* added force to the complaints of young men who were cheated by their *kāranavans*. The fact that only the *kāranavan* may propitiate the lineage ghosts points up both his responsibility to the ghosts to ensure good conduct and prosperity in his *taravād*, and also his responsibility to his juniors to ensure the favor of the ghosts.

I have myself recorded no case in which lineage ghosts were believed to have actually prevented a crime on the part of a *kāranavan*, as distinct from punishing one. V. K.

778 All the land about it, measuring a mile square, is said to
423 belong to it. This would be enormous property, as the
[635] taluk where this kavoo is situated is one of the richest in Travancore. A trifle is given by the Sircar every year. If more funds are required, the Nambiyadi is expected to meet them from his own private income. The grove and its temples cover an immense oblong space measuring about 16 acres in extent. The inmates of the Illam are
[688] the poojaries of the gods in this grove. It is believed
[825] that whenever the poojah is not performed with the strictest personal purity or care to small details, the serpent gods get offended, which feeling is exhibited by
778 the largest cobras coming out of the grove. It should be
776 remembered that, as a rule, the serpents are not seen out
825 of their holes, though hundreds of them are known to exist in these large groves. When any is seen, especially if a real cobra, the village astrologer is consulted, who readily finds out the cause of the wrath of the serpent gods, and steps are taken immediately to pacify them by propitiatory ceremonies. The people believe in these ceremonies most implicitly. That is not a mere form with them. In a house in North Travancore, where
776 I lived some years, there used to be seen now and again
825 snakes of all kinds, and in answer to my request to the servant of my landlord to keep the kavoo neat, he invariably said, "Please, sir, order some lights and milk to the kavoo," for this man most sincerely believed that this was the only effective way of keeping out the snakes from view. He did not seem to believe that there was any good in keeping the premises neat and clean. It should here be noted that a true Hindu population never pelt at or harm the snakes when they are seen. They are objects of worship. One of our retired officials told me that some years ago, when he was young and new to the place, he was puzzled by some of the parties present at his cutcherry telling him that the 'god was coming.' The crowd made way, and on rising, this official was horrified to see that the god referred to was a live cobra. This village he spoke of, even now abounds with serpents, but strange to say, these reptiles
[231] seldom harm man. They are evidently become domesticated animals, for we seldom hear of snake-bites in that village, though the general belief is that there are more snakes there than rats. The people also seem to be quite at home with them, for they do not get put out when they see these reptiles."

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

564
463
182 Internal structure of the caste.
174

Caste assigns to each individual his profession or calling; and when once the system is handed down from father to son, and from generation to generation, it is found impossible for any person or his descendants to change for any other the condition of life which the law assigns to him. The most far-sighted and prudent men in ancient times probably found such an institution to be the only means for maintaining a system of civilisation amongst a people endowed with the peculiar characteristics of the Hindus.

The important principle which guided all ancient legislators was, that no man in the commonwealth should be left without work. At the same time, they knew that the people were indolent by nature. They were further aware of the fact that, unless every individual was duly provided with some work, for which he might be best fited, the social fabric must necessarily fall to pieces. The law-givers therefore established durable and inviolable rules for the different castes constituting [626] the Hindu race the violation of which brings divine displeasure, and meets with severe punishment both in this world [688] and in the world to come.

564 It is some such guiding principle that is involved in the division of the Nayars into various sub-castes. In Kerala the 174 Brahmans seem to have been instrumental in the formation of castes to some extent; for, it is found that some castes have to do services in temples to Brahmans. Distinct professional [463] groups in the tribal organisations may have existed there before the advent of these people, who probably found it easy to make a ready adjustment of the social groups, and thought it advisable to assign to them well defined occupations. Therefore, the original institution of the caste system does not merit any serious condemnation.

Some are of opinion that it is not quite correct to say that the Nayars are a caste, and that it would be better to call them a tribe, as Bhattacharya has done in his 'Castes and [114] Sects'. I am however inclined to think that the name is not quite appropriate, and that they do form a caste of people, known as Malayali Sudras.

564 In regard to subdivisions, there is no uniformity. So numerous and varied are they in Cochin, Malabar, and Travancore, that titles of distinction that have been conferred upon

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

[P. 72]

CHAPTER II.

—:o:—

THE SUDRAS OF COCHIN.

——:o:——

A. THE HIGH CASTE SUDRAS (NAYARS)

(Continued).

582 According to Nayar ideas the most desirable bride for a young man is the daughter of his maternal uncle.

588 585 Marriage customs. There are two forms of marriage in vogue among the Nayars, namely, the *Thálikettu kalyánam* (*táli* tying ceremony), and the *Sambandham* (the customary nuptial union of man and woman), the first of which is performed for every girl before puberty, and the second, the real adult marriage, is celebrated after she comes of age. The *táli* tying for every girl is compulsory before she arrives at maturity,[1] and the omission or neglect of it will place her and her family under a ban; for, it is considered a religious impurity for a girl to attain puberty before the performance of this ceremony. There is however a tendency for these restrictions to be overlooked now-a-days.

[688] [182]

588 In every *taravád* or family, the ceremony is performed once in ten or twelve years, and all the girls down to the baby in the cradle, who have not already undergone this ceremony, are married in this fashion for the sake of economy. When, in a family, the *táli* tying ceremony has to be performed for a girl or a number of girls, the *káranavan* or senior member thereof, at a meeting of the friends and relatives of the family, sends for the local astrologer, who after examining the horoscope or horoscopes of the girl or girls determines the auspicious hour for it as well as for certain subsidiary rites

[787]

[784] 1. As a rule, the tali tying ceremony is performed before the girl attains puberty, but sometimes it is performed afterwards. In the latter case, the girl is prohibited from entering temples during the period intervening between the attainment of puberty and the tali tying ceremony.

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906) 1912
AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

643 646

rights. Thus did these *kúttams* (assemblies) exercise a wholesome influence, and act as a powerful check upon the rulers and ministers of the middle ages.[1] They also dealt with wider questions of castes and other matters affecting the welfare of the people. In former times there were also minor councils 623 of *Pramánis* or leaders of the people in every *Desam* exercising similar social functions. A survival of this system even now exists in every village, and their deliberations and decisions upon social matters and caste disputes have great weight. In important matters such as the outcasting of a member of the caste, etc., His Highness the Raja who has always been the [643] social as well as the political head of the State would deliberate [692] upon them with the help of the Brahman *vaidiks*, and his decisions become final. The individual who is placed under a ban [688] is prohibited from entering any temple, bathing in the public tanks, and is, in short, ostracised.

643

Administration of justice.

The Rajas were in former times the fountain of all justice, but were assisted by *Karyakkars* or ministers 642 and Brahmans in administering it. All caste disputes and offences were left to the caste assemblies to deal 623 with, while civil disputes were either left to the arbitration of 681 the caste assemblies or of three or four prominent men. There 564 was no written code, but the punishments assigned by custom [671] fitted the crimes, and they varied with the status of the caste and of the person. The nobles enjoyed the privilege of freedom from confinement. The Brahmans and women were never put to death; the former were punished for grave offences by loss of caste and banishment, and the latter by being sold as slaves. The punishment of death was reserved for such heinous [688] offences as sacrilege, the wilful murder of a Brahman or a cow. The following is a summary of the account given by 175 Duarte Barbosa, pp. 116—117, regarding the methods of dealing 564 with criminals and the nature of the punishments inflicted on 685 them in former times:—When any member of a low caste committed robbery about which a complaint had been made to the king or the governor, orders were issued for his apprehension, and if he was caught and he confessed his guilt, he was generally impaled. His head was severed, and the body being placed on its back, the arms and legs were fastened with ropes to four posts, while the multitude to show their contempt spat upon it. If, however, the malefactor was a Moor, he was beheaded. The

1. Letters from Malabar by J. C. Visscher, pages 76-77.